

If you're planning a trip to Behrampore in Murshidabad, drop in at Bhattabati (or Bhattamati), a village near Lalbag.

The name can be traced to the regime of Nawab Hussein Shah (1493-1519), when 1,200 Bhatta Brahmin families from Karnat in south India settled down here.

No one from the Bhatta clan lives here anymore, but you can visit the 200-year-old *pancharatna* Shiva temple, which boasts some exquisite terracotta artwork. Also known as the Ratneswar temple, the central ratna — or pin-



nacle — soars higher than the others. The state archaeology department had undertaken restoration work here, but the job was done shoddily.

This single door of the temple faces south. On one side of the entrance are incidents from the life of Ram. The other side has terracotta figures depicting Krishna's life. At the base of the entrance there are rows of soldiers. The central panel has scenes from daily life, with some panels showing the Nawab watching dancing girls.

Vaishnavite iconography finds free rein on the east

Next weekend you can be at ...

Bhattabati

wall - with a six-armed Lord Krishna seen with idols of Gour-Nitai and Radha-Krishna on either side. The north wall displays Vishnu with three legs: one pointing upwards to the heavens while another faces the earth. The third leg rests on the head of King Bali, thrusting him into *patal lok*. The Bali figure has been defaced over the years. Above this statue is a large *ras chakra*.

On the west wall you get to see a huge but heavily damaged Matsya Avatar of Vishnu with Durga and her family

above it. There are two huge figures of hunters standing over them.

There are numerous other intricate figures and scenes on the walls. It seems as if the artists were given a free hand to display their creativity. Sadly, there's nothing to indicate who ordered the temple to be built. Little has been done to protect such a fine example of Bengal's terracotta art.

(Metro on Sunday thanks reader AMITABHA GUPTA for this contribution.

Pictures by author)

Going

Hazarduari Express from Calcutta station reaches Murshidabad by 11.30am. Take a rickshaw to Lalbag Sadar Ghat. Cross the Bhagirathi in a motorised country boat. Take another rickshaw ride to reach Bhattabati 5km away. From there it is a 20-minute walk to the temple. You can return the same day by the same train in the afternoon.

Staying

Bhattabati offers no accommodation. You can stay at Behrampore.

